

Deaf and Multi-Cultural

Promoting Communication Accessibility & Cultural Relevance

The Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services (BDS) has a goal of providing culturally appropriate and linguistically accessible services to consumers and their families. This is accomplished through accommodations to existing services, creation of specialized resources, and through increasing the quality and quantity of specialized resources and educational programs for staff, providers and consumers.

A policy regarding communication access has been adopted by BDS in order to assure that the services and supports offered by this Department are available and understood whether the consumer is deaf or has limited English proficiency. This policy covers telephone access (including TTY and fax), interpreters, use of bilingual staff, and contract expectations for community providers.

In addition, the Department is one of only three states to implement Medicaid reimbursement for part of the cost for interpreting both sign and spoken languages; maintains contracts with interpreter services (sign language and spoken language); translates brochures and major documents into Maine's predominant languages; and updates consumer data bases to include fields for language and communication needs.

Cultural competency among staff and employees is a major focus of the Department's mandatory Diversity Training. This training is designed and carried out via a Diversity Team.

The Department has representation on various multicultural committees such as the Mental Health Services to Refugees Committee, Cross Cultural Family Network, Migrant Worker Forum and Migrant, Refugee Services, and Seasonal Farm Worker Health Services Council. This participation is designed to increase access to services for refugees, immigrants, migrant workers and other limited English proficient and ethnic minorities in Maine and promote collaboration between service entities.

Over 20 trainings were offered to mental health, and substance abuse provider agencies on the use of interpreters, cultural competence and culturally specific services in FY '01. Ongoing training is offered to interpreters on the unique requirements of interpreting in mental health and substance abuse settings. Adult mental retardation services has incorporated communication accessibility through case managers who use sign language and through training offered in visual gestural communication.

Collaboration is a major focus of the BDS deaf and multi-cultural efforts, specific examples of this include:

- Working with the Department of Human Services Maine Care program to assist in developing policy that allows interpreters for Maine Care recipients to be reimbursed.
- Working with the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation to establish the licensing requirements for sign language interpreters.
- Working as a founding member of the Deaf Advocacy Group, providing a bi-monthly forum for inter-agency collaboration.
- Major collaborative efforts have occurred with the Departments of Education, Labor and Human Services to address the needs and concerns of survivors of abuse at Governor Baxter School for the Deaf. The Department is represented at Safer Place, the forum for addressing needs and providing restorative services to survivors of abuse at Governor Baxter School for the Deaf.

For more information about BDS visit: www.state.me.us/bds/

BDS philosophy - We must help the person who comes to us for services in the language in which they are most comfortable and in a manner that is culturally relevant.



State of Maine
Department of Behavioral
And Developmental Services

Lynn F. Duby, Commissioner

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